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Institutional Expectations, Opportunities, and Interest in the Professoriate: A Mixed-Methods Examination of Satisfaction Among Doctoral Students in Social Work

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Abstract: This article explores doctoral student satisfaction as related to interest in the professoriate and as influenced by issues of social justice, according to a national student survey. Results indicate that 85% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with their doctoral education. Most satisfying aspects were individualization or independence, collegiality or collaboration, praxis or translation, and reaching or achieving milestones. Least satisfying aspects were educational environments or climates, course quality, mentorship quality, and finances. Eighty percent reported that satisfaction was “explained by social justice training opportunities and a sense of a socially just institution.” At research-intensive universities, satisfaction predicted interest in the professoriate. Understanding student satisfaction may improve doctoral education and the faculty pipeline.

Institutional Expectations, Opportunities, and Interest in the Professoriate: A Mixed-Methods Examination of Satisfaction Among Doctoral Students in Social Work

Doctoral education in social work and social welfare has the task of preparing individuals for the responsibilities and actions of steering, transmitting, and expanding the knowledge base of the discipline (Anastas & Kuerbis, 2009; Fong, 2014; Hudson, Shapiro, Moylan, Garcia, & Derr, 2014). Doctoral education itself, however, is not well understood (Anastas & Kuerbis, 2009). Little is known about outcomes across programs, such as scholarly productivity or job placement (Abbott, 1985; Baker & Wilson, 1992; Green, Baskind, & Conklin, 1995; Green, Hutchinson, & Sar, 1992; Rosen, 1979) or student experiences in programs (Figueira-McDonough, 1981, 1982; Bentley, 2013; Shapiro, Hudson, Moylan, & Derr, 2015; Sales, 1975). To our knowledge, there are only three studies of the experience of doctoral education in social work and social welfare across programs (Anastas, 2012; Loewenberg & Shinn, 1972; Patchner, 1982). Studying the experience of earning a doctorate of philosophy (PhD) across programs is important for identifying mechanisms for improving educational outcomes, which include increasing the number of faculty with PhDs in schools of social work. This article aims to help those in social work more strategically prepare for the future of the discipline by examining student satisfaction with doctoral education and student motivation for the professoriate as it intersects with personal and professional ideals of social justice.

The unmet demand for doctoral-level faculty

The number of doctoral-level faculty at accredited schools of social work in the United States is inadequate relative to the demand (Zastrow & Bremner, 2004). Only 40% of faculty hold doctoral degrees (Council on Social Work Education [CSWE], 2014). A doctoral degree is a preferred credential in 95% of faculty search announcements, and 25% of faculty searches do not successfully fill vacancies (Anastas, 2006; Anastas & Kuerbis, 2009). The inability for social work program directors to fill faculty vacancies is expected to be exacerbated over the next decade with impending retirements, an increase in the number of social work programs, and an escalation of competition for candidates. One strategy to meet the demand for doctoral-level faculty in social work would be to increase the pool of social workers with doctoral degrees prepared for and desiring faculty positions.

About 300 individuals earn their doctoral degree in social work or social welfare annually in the United States (CSWE, 2014). Only about half of graduates who have definitive employment plans at the time of graduation have committed to academic appointments (Anastas & Kuerbis, 2009), compared to about 75% of doctoral program graduates across other professional fields (Thurgood, Golladay, & Hill, 2006). Doctoral program directors report that only half of social work doctoral students have faculty aspirations and that only 41% of program

graduates become faculty members (34% tenure line, 7% nontenure line) at accredited programs (CSWE, 2014; Dinerman, Feldman, & Ello, 1999). To understand factors that contribute to the gap between the demand for doctoral-level social workers in academia and the supply of candidates to fill them, it may be useful to study social work doctoral students and their satisfaction with their academic experiences.

Who are doctoral students in social work and social welfare?

Doctoral-level social workers' aspirations for faculty positions may be informed by their demographic characteristics, which diverge from those of other disciplines (Patchner, 1982; Sales, 1975). About 70% of doctoral graduates each year are women, which is a high percentage even relative to other fields with high proportions of women such as education (Anastas & Kuerbis, 2009; Thurgood et al., 2006). Social work's license-eligible master's degree and its ideal of postmaster's professional experience likely produces older doctoral students (median age 40), which in turn implies higher rates of graduates who are in partnerships (55% married) and are supporting dependent children (40%) (Anastas & Kuerbis, 2009). These demographic characteristics may structurally bind graduates to particular geographic regions and compensation requirements when considering faculty positions.

Racial and ethnic identity, citizenship status, and socioeconomic class likely intersect with the aforementioned demographic characteristics in ways that may inhibit doctoral-level social workers from seeking and accepting academic positions (Bowen & Bok, 1999). The percentage of doctoral program graduates who identify with a racial category other than White, non-Hispanic is higher than the aggregate percentage in all professional fields (Anastas & Kuerbis, 2009). LeDoux (1996) noted the particular importance of geographic location when students of color are making institutional affiliation decisions. Furthermore, the number of graduating doctoral students in social work with U.S. citizenship shrunk from 90% to 80% from 1994 to 2004, which may also shape opportunity structures in the U.S. academic job market (Anastas & Kuerbis, 2009). Over the same time period, the average cumulative debt held by social work doctoral graduates more than doubled. As a result, in graduates from social work doctoral programs in 2004 carried more than \$30,000 in education-related debt (Anastas & Kuerbis, 2009). By 2013, 66% of doctoral graduates carried loan debt, with the mean amount of \$42,149 (CSWE, 2013). These economic considerations are likely to shape career paths, perhaps in ways that make social welfare graduates unique among their peers (Loewenberg & Shinn, 1972).

Given the structural barriers to accepting faculty positions for many doctoral program graduates, doctoral-level social workers need to be highly motivated and persistent to overcome obstacles. Anastas and Kuerbis (2009) have thoughtfully called for more research that seeks to understand the motivations of our doctoral students to earn the doctoral degree, the experiences of students in doctoral education, and how identification with marginalized identity groups (i.e., membership in groups that have been historically excluded from the academy) can shape these motivations and experiences.

Doctoral student satisfaction

The modest literature on doctoral student satisfaction across disciplines suggests that about 81% of students report satisfaction with their doctoral education (Fagen & Suedkamp Wells, 2004) and less than 10% report dissatisfaction with their doctoral education. On 5-point scales, students report high confidence in their decision to pursue a doctoral degree ($M = 4.07$), their choice of doctoral program ($M = 3.89$), and overall satisfaction with their doctoral program ($M = 3.73$; Nettles & Millet, 2006). Studies have found that human interactions (e.g., with faculty, advisers, peers) largely predict satisfaction (Nettles & Millet, 2006; Zhao, Golde, & McCormick, 2007).

Might satisfaction be different among social work students based on demographic differences? No demographic group differences in satisfaction have been found in previous studies across academic disciplines, but lower levels of satisfaction have been reported when respondents are members of minority groups in their discipline, for example, female engineering students (Nettles & Millet, 2006). Because the demography of doctoral students in social work appears to be relatively unique, the experiences of social work doctoral students should be studied directly. In such studies, institutional affiliation and phase of doctoral studies should be considered. Institutional type, as it intersects with student demographic characteristics such as gender, race, and age, has been associated with satisfaction and retention (Gardner, 2012). Furthermore, satisfaction increases as students advance through the program (Baird, 1992), which may reflect increasing customization or dissatisfied student withdrawal (Lovitts, 2001).

The doctoral student experience in social work

Of the three national surveys of doctoral students in social work, the first was conducted in 1969, justifying the inquiry, as we have, through a need to retain more doctoral-level social workers in academia (Loewenberg & Shinn, 1972). This study reports that 60% of graduates at the time became professors. A second national survey was conducted in 1979 to learn about the experience of doctoral education from those who had completed the degree within the prior decade (Patchner, 1982). When retrospectively asked about the quality of their education, it was characterized as very good by 51% of respondents, moderately good by 40%, neutral by 5%, and poor by 4%. The third national study was conducted in 2006–2007, using an electronic mailing list of doctoral program directors asking them to invite current doctoral students to participate in a Web-based survey (Anastas, 2012). Study respondents were somewhat more likely to be female, married, White U.S. citizens with educational debt than the population of doctoral students at the time. The most frequent motivation for seeking a doctoral degree (44% of respondents) was “to change jobs, such as start an academic career.” Interestingly, the study author noted that a substantial number of students wrote down a response choice that was not offered, which was that their motivation for doctoral study was a desire to effect social change.

Doctoral students in this study were very satisfied (41%), somewhat satisfied (51%), or not satisfied (8%) with their education (Anastas, 2012). These rates may be lower than those of typical graduate students, although the 3-point scale renders it difficult to determine. Aspects of the doctoral experience related to satisfaction (as determined through closed-ended questions) included having relationships (i.e., cohort connectedness, availability of faculty, peer support, role models) and being treated with respect. Illustrative comments made by some study participants revealed that the lack of student diversity, faculty cultural competence, and a sense of belonging (e.g., isolation, alienation, ethnocentrism) contributed to dissatisfaction. Only 34% of students were very satisfied with the curriculum, reporting problems in the areas of research (e.g., lack of application to service settings, exclusive emphasis on quantitative methods), diversity, and global content. As noted by the study author,

There were no questions on the student survey that asked about the explicit or implicit curriculum with respect to diversity—an omission that some respondents complained about. However, several students commented on diversity issues in their remarks. Given these kinds of concerns, it would seem urgent that diversity issues be discussed with respect to doctoral education. (Anastas, 2012, pp. 112–113)

Following this lead, this article provides a cross-sectional description of the satisfactions and interests of a national sample of PhD students during 2013–2014, nearly a decade since the last across-program inquiry into the doctoral experience. This survey-based study asked students to rate their satisfaction with doctoral education, their interest in the professoriate, and their perception of whether there are programmatic expectations for students in their PhD program to pursue the professoriate. Unlike any prior studies, this study considered stage of program and program affiliation so that individual and programmatic contributions to the variance in responses can be assessed. Most important, this study explicitly focused on satisfaction with doctoral education as related to student perceptions of social justice. Because definitions of social justice can vary greatly based on a number of important factors, including personal and educational background, we asked participants to reflect on their understandings and conceptualizations of social justice as the basis for their responses. Largely, respondents drew on a modern liberal theory of social justice for social work, including equality, fairness, and opportunity. Specific patterns and themes in respondents' definitions of social justice are beyond the scope of this article and are discussed in depth elsewhere (Hudson, 2016). For the purposes of this article, we ask readers to refer to Barker's (2003) definition of social justice as "an ideal condition in which all members of society have the same basic rights, protection, opportunities, obligations, and social benefits" (pp. 404–405). Given previous studies' omissions, and student reactions to the omissions of those studies, we expected themes of social justice to be related to satisfaction and motivation to seek faculty positions, which could reveal a mechanism for augmenting satisfaction and motivation to seek faculty positions.

Method

This study was approved by the University of California, Berkeley's institutional review board. Following the protocol used by Anastas (2012), investigators sent an initial e-mail, and two follow-up e-mails, to an electronic mailing list of directors of doctoral programs containing an invitation to participate in the study to be forwarded to their doctoral student bodies. This mailing list, maintained by the Group for the Advancement of Doctoral Education in Social Work (GADE), includes doctoral program directors at about 80 member universities. The GADE membership list is used annually by the CSWE to collect data from doctoral-level programs. All U.S. institutions with established social work or social welfare doctoral programs, located in an accredited university or college that offers a master's of social work or social welfare degree program and has been fully accredited by the CSWE, is eligible for GADE membership; there are no known doctoral programs in the United States that are not GADE-affiliated (E. Lightfoot, personal communication, September, 28, 2015). The same forwarding request was made once to doctoral program coordinators (staff) at each GADE-affiliated doctoral program. Thus, over a four-month period, students in GADE-affiliated doctoral programs may have been invited to complete an anonymous survey. The e-mail subject line communicated our intention to study social justice in doctoral education and contained a link to a Web-based survey designed and administered through WebQ (<https://itconnect.uw.edu/learn/tools/catalyst-web-tools/webq/>), an Internet-based survey platform (Shapiro et al., 2015).

Survey items

Ten questions were used to assess student motivation and satisfaction with their doctoral educations and to characterize respondents and institutions (See Table 1). The question, "To what extent do you consider yourself to belong to identity groups structurally marginalized in academia?" was intended to help describe our sample and the relationship between marginalization and other survey responses. The phrasing of this question was intentionally vague to not reveal the identities of the respondents by asking about different dimensions of intersecting identities while also asking for institutional affiliation and program start year and stage (which have been previously related to satisfaction). Although the vagueness of this question has disadvantages, we decided participation rates and the overall quality of the data would be enhanced by protecting the respondents from disclosing their identities to the researchers.

Table 1. Survey questions.

Question	Response Options
1 To what extent are you interested in becoming a professor after you complete your doctoral education?	Very interested Somewhat interested Somewhat uninterested Very uninterested Open-ended
2 What has been the most satisfying part of your doctoral education, so far?	Open-ended
3 What has been the least satisfying part of your doctoral education, so far?	Open-ended
4 Overall, how satisfying has doctoral training in social work or social welfare been for you, so far?	Very satisfactory Satisfactory Unsatisfactory Very unsatisfactory
5 To what extent is your "opinion of how satisfying the program is" explained by your perceptions of social justice training opportunities and the sense of a socially just institution?	Entirely explained Significantly explained Partially explained Unexplained
6 In what year did you begin your doctoral education?	Open-ended
7 What is your current status as a doctoral student?	Primarily working on MSW requirements as part of an MSW/PhD combined program Primarily working on doctoral program course requirements Primarily working on qualifying or candidacy milestone Primarily working on dissertation Completed dissertation this year List of programs
8 From what institution are you earning (or did you just earn) your doctoral degree in social work or social welfare?	List of programs
9 To what extent does your doctoral program have expectations that students will ultimately seek a tenure-track faculty position after degree completion?	Strong expectations Moderate expectations Low expectations No expectations
10 To what extent do you consider yourself to belong to identity groups structurally marginalized in academia?	Very much Somewhat Not too much Not at all

Research questions

This article first asks the following descriptive questions of the data: To what extent are PhD students satisfied with doctoral education in social work and social welfare? To what extent are PhD students interested in becoming professors? and, To what extent do PhD students perceive that it is the expectation of their doctoral programs that they will become professors? Data are presented from each topic to explore the extent to which satisfaction, interest, and expectations vary by program affiliation, and whether levels of satisfaction, interest, and expectation reported by respondents vary by the student's phase of program, report of belonging to a group structurally marginalized within academia, the level of institutional research activity, and the private or public designation of the institution. We hypothesize that PhD students are highly satisfied with doctoral education, have a strong interest in becoming a professor, and perceive high institutional expectations to become a professor. We expect that each of these factors varies by institution and increase as students move further along in the program. We expect that levels for each of these factors may be lower for students who associate themselves with groups that have been structurally marginalized by academia, as colleges and universities may be less welcoming and inspiring places under such conditions.

This article then explores the extent to which a student's satisfaction and perceptions of institutional expectations for the professoriate relate to a student's interest in the professoriate and the extent to which satisfaction with doctoral education is related to themes of social justice. We hypothesize that satisfaction and institutional expectations for the professoriate increase interest in the professoriate and that given student dissatisfaction with the omission of social justice content on a prior satisfaction survey, many students will agree with the statement that themes of social justice explain their satisfaction with doctoral education. Finally, this article explores the most satisfying and least satisfying aspects of doctoral education, as reported by respondents in this sample, which we explore inductively.

Analysis procedure

Because our objective was to provide descriptive information related to the experience of PhD students, frequency distributions and cross tabulations of theoretically interesting 2x2 matrices are presented. Interclass correlations are reported to tease apart between-person and between-program differences in closed-ended survey responses. A latent thematic analysis was conducted on responses to the two open-ended questions concerning aspects of PhD student satisfaction with doctoral education (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This type of analysis systematically looks for underlying ideas, meaning, and patterns within and across narrative data. A code book was created to organize the emerging list of codes, to look for patterns and similarities among codes, and to group similar codes into themes (Padgett, 2008). Thus, the qualitative analysis was inductive and data driven, and suggests a thematic framework unique to respective responses.

Sample

Survey responses from 191 students were submitted, nearly 8% of the students currently enrolled in social work doctoral programs (CSWE, 2012). Responses were excluded from the quantitative analysis if the students did not identify themselves with a specific GADE-affiliated PhD program in the United States, did not begin their doctoral studies within 10 years prior to the survey, nor indicate the primary phase of doctoral study they were currently engaged in (e.g., course work, seeking candidacy, dissertation writing). Students from DSW programs were excluded because of insufficient respondents from these programs to make any trustworthy claims about DSW programs, and contemporary DSW programs are intended to differ from PhD programs in their goals, emphasis, and outcomes. In total, 31 cases were dropped from our analysis for one or more of these reasons.

Characteristics of the respondents in our analysis sample (N = 160) are reported in Table 2. The majority (76%) of respondents came from programs at public universities, a number that makes sense, given that 70% of doctoral programs in social work are housed in public institutions. Nearly all (93%) of our respondents came from Carnegie Classified research universities or institutions that grant a minimum of 20 doctoral degrees. The diversity of

Carnegie Classifications represented in our sample (see Table 2) very closely reflects the proportions of social work doctoral programs in each classification. Respondents came from 53 programs of the 73 PhD programs in the United States affiliated with GADE at the time of data collection (Group for the Advancement of Doctoral Education in Social Work [GADE], 2017). The highest number of respondents from any given program was 12; the mean number of responses per responding program was 3. Unfortunately, this study was insufficiently powered to detect significant multivariate relationships through the routine use of multilevel models.

Results

Extent and nature of satisfaction in doctoral education

Consistent with our hypothesis, nearly 85% of students reported some positive level of satisfaction with doctoral education (see Table 2). Fourteen percent of the variance in individual responses of satisfaction with doctoral education captured differences between programs. We examined differences between those who were very satisfied (32%) and everyone else (68%). Students at private

Table 2. Description of sample and responses.

Sample Characteristics (<i>N</i> = 160–191)	%	Doctoral Student Responses	%
Year beginning doctoral education		Satisfaction with doctoral education	
2005–2006	3	Very satisfied	32
2007–2009	25	Satisfied	53
2010	19	Unsatisfied	11
2011	24	Very unsatisfied	4
2012	19	Interest in becoming a professor	
2013	10	Very interested	62
Phase of program		Somewhat interested	25
Course work	28	Somewhat uninterested	9
Candidacy	28	Very uninterested	4
Dissertation	37	Program expectations for tenure-track	
Graduated during study year	7	Strong expectations	59
Geographic region of the United States		Moderate expectations	33
Northeast	25	Low expectations	7
South	28	No expectations	0
Midwest	16	Satisfaction explained by social justice	
West	31	Entirely explained	4
Carnegie Classification of university		Significantly explained	28
RU—Very high research activity	71	Partially explained	48
RU—High research activity	17	Unexplained	20
RU—Doctoral university	3		
Master's colleges	7		
Baccalaureate universities	2		
Belongs to identity groups structurally marginalized in the academy			
Very much	22		
Somewhat	41		
Not too much	30		
Not at all	12		

Note. RU= research university

institutions were more often very satisfied (47%) compared with students at public institutions (27%, $\chi^2 = 5.360$, $p = .02$). Contrary to our hypothesis, there were no significant differences in satisfaction based on the level of institutional research activity. There were also no significant differences between the satisfaction of respondents at different phases of the PhD program (pre- or post-candidacy), or the extent of identification with marginalized groups.

Extent and nature of interest in the professoriate

Consistent with our hypothesis, nearly two thirds of students indicated they were very interested in becoming a professor, an arguably higher rate than previously reported, indicating promise for retention to faculty positions (see Table 2). Some variance in individual interest in the professoriate reflected differences between programs (30%). The phase of the program did not differentiate between those very interested in becoming a professor (62%) from everyone else (38%). On the other hand, students who highly identified with marginalized groups disproportionately ($\chi^2 = 4.995$, $p = .03$) indicated high interest in the professoriate (69%) relative to their less marginalized peers (52%). Students at public institutions were more interested in the professoriate (67% very interested) than students at private institutions (47%, $\chi^2 = 4.715$, $p = .03$). Similarly, 68% of students at institutions with very high research activity were very interested in the professoriate compared with only 50% of students at institutions with less research activity ($\chi^2 = 4.947$, $p = .03$).

Extent and nature of institutional expectations for the professoriate

Consistent with our hypothesis, most respondents (92%) indicated their program had modest or strong expectations for students to seek faculty positions (see Table 2). Thirty-eight percent of the variance in these programmatic expectations could be accounted for through differences between programs. Based on the distribution of programmatic expectations, we sought to determine what differentiates those reporting strong expectations (59%) from everyone else (40%). Three quarters of students reporting strong programmatic expectations were at institutions characterized by very high research activity ($\chi^2 = 8.335$, $p = .00$).

The majority of students (61%) were at institutions where expectations for seeking faculty positions matched their personal interests in doing so. On the other hand, there were cases of misaligned interests. Some students (21%) had high interest in academic careers despite moderate to no programmatic expectations. Another group of students (18%) enrolled in programs with strong programmatic expectations were only somewhat interested or uninterested in an academic career. Although students with high levels of interest in academic careers were generally matched to programs with strong expectations for them ($\chi^2 = 5.549$, $p = .02$), there may be opportunities to (a) broaden preparation for the professoriate to programs where this is not currently emphasized to cultivate existing student interest for academic careers and to (b) promote more interest in the professoriate among students at institutions with such expectations.

Relationship between satisfaction, institutional expectations for the professoriate, and interest in the professoriate

Contrary to our hypothesis, there were no significant differences between respondents' degree of interest in the professoriate and their satisfaction with doctoral education. Among PhD students at institutions characterized by very high research activity, however, the extent to which students were satisfied with their doctoral education predicted their interest in the professoriate, although it explained only a small amount of the variance ($p = .03$; $r^2 = .05$). There were no significant differences in satisfaction with doctoral education based on programmatic expectations for students to seek faculty positions.

Relationship between social justice and satisfaction

When PhD students were directly asked to what extent their satisfaction with doctoral education is explained by issues related to social justice, consistent with our hypothesis, 80% of students reported that their level of satisfaction, to some extent, is "explained through social justice training opportunities and a sense of a socially just institution" (see Table 2). In fact, 32% of student respondents said that issues of social justice entirely or significantly explained their level of satisfaction. Only 5% of the variance in an individual's use of a social justice lens to explain satisfaction was attributable to differences among programs. Contrary to what one might expect, there were no differences in the use of a social justice lens to explain satisfaction between respondents at public and private institutions, nor between highly marginalized and less marginalized students.

There was a nonsignificant trend between the respondent's stage of program and the degree to which satisfaction was explained through social justice, ($\chi^2 = 3.196$, $p = .07$), with 26% of respondents precandidacy and 40% of respondents postcandidacy explaining their satisfaction through social justice. Interestingly, 26% of students at institutions with very high research activity explained their satisfaction through social justice compared with 44% of people at institutions with lower research activity ($\chi^2 = 5.240$, $p = .02$). Additional data would be needed to tease out selection effects from experiences resulting from different program emphases. Among PhD students at institutions with very high research activity, students explaining their satisfaction through issues related to social justice were less satisfied ($p = .03$, $r^2 = .05$). Among students at all GADE-affiliated PhD programs, this relationship was marginally significant ($p = .058$, $r^2 = .02$), and in both cases, no more than 5% of variance in satisfaction was explained.

Aspects of satisfaction and dissatisfaction in doctoral education

Several relatively strong themes emerged from the analysis of open-ended responses concerning the satisfaction of PhD students (see Table 3). The majority of responses (91%) were represented in at least one theme related to the most satisfying aspects; 94% of responses were represented in themes related to the least satisfying aspects of doctoral education. Themes related to the most satisfying aspects of doctoral education in social work, in ranked order, were (a) individualization and independence, (b) collegiality and collaboration, (b) praxis and translation, and (c) reaching and achieving milestones. Themes that emerged in response to our question about the least satisfying aspects of doctoral education in social work, also ranked, were (a) educational environment and climate, (b) quality of courses, (c) quality of mentorship, and (d) financial issues.

Most satisfying aspects of doctoral education in social work

Individualization and independence

Respondents indicated that opportunities related to individualizing their education (including selecting electives, substantive area of interest, dissertation topic and methodological approach) enhanced their educational experience. Many respondents also mentioned the opportunity to continue to learn and to be presented with new learning challenges was most satisfying. For many, these opportunities reflected an inherent programmatic value of students' independent thinking and freedom to learn. One respondent noted that the most satisfying part of their doctoral education was "coming up with my own ideas for research and having their importance validated by faculty members," and another said "the freedom to focus on my areas of interest and to explore them in departments across campus." This response illustrates not only the positive impact of independent thinking and learning but also the critical role faculty feedback and encouragement plays in promoting those kinds of behaviors and skills within and across departments and disciplines.

Collegiality and collaboration

In a similar vein, the importance of healthy faculty-student relationships was also a central element in the theme of collegiality and collaboration and included access to scholars (for example, as mentors or course instructors) in students' area of interest in and outside the department. These faculty-student connections also included access to educational and professional development through publication opportunities. One respondent said "incredible mentorship and ability to produce first author papers and chapters" was the primary source of his or her satisfaction. A number of respondents indicated that the interdisciplinary connections, across campus and at research conferences, enhanced their doctoral experience. Although this aspect of satisfaction positively illustrates perceived departmental openness to interdisciplinarity,

it may be of concern to some program directors to know that the most satisfying aspect of students' doctoral education is not located within the home department. Other respondents specified that the satisfying aspects of collegiality and collaboration were found primarily in relationships with other students. One respondent answered that the most satisfying part of their doctoral education was "meeting social work colleagues and fellow students who will (no doubt) make major contributions to the field of social work." This respondent then goes on to add: "I have fallen in love all over again with the social

Table 3. Most and least satisfying aspects of doctoral education.

Most Satisfying	Least Satisfying
Individualization and independence	Educational environment and climate
Collegiality and collaboration	Quality of courses
Translation and praxis	Quality of mentorship
Reaching and achieving milestones	Financial issues

Praxis and translation

The third theme, praxis and translation, had to do with opportunities to apply course work and classroom-based learning in students' own research and independent learning in their substantive area of interest. This theme also included PhD students' application and translation of practice experience into their doctoral studies and course work. One respondent recounted, "I was a clinician for 15 years and [I was] able to put all of that knowledge into my studies, thinking about how to research and disseminate the information to clinicians and the public." This response indicated satisfaction related to consistent experiences of practice-informed research and research-informed practice, supported by students' growing expertise in research and the opportunity to disseminate their work to practitioners. For example, one respondent made a reflective turn and expressed satisfaction about "thinking more broadly about my experiences and how they can be passed on to others to assist in their learning." Finally, this theme also included expressed satisfaction stemming from learning to teach, teaching in areas of interest, and contributing to curriculum development.

Reaching and achieving milestones

This theme was reflected in responses indicating progress toward the degree and the sense of achievement in relation to reaching and completing programmatic milestones. One respondent noted that the most satisfying doctoral moment was "successfully defending my dissertation proposal, the culmination of a lot of hard work." Mention was made of all other common doctoral milestones, including admission to the program, first-year course work, exams, candidacy, first publication, dissertation proposal, data collection, and defense of the dissertation.

Least satisfying aspects of doctoral education in social work

Educational environment and climate

Certain aspects of the educational environment seemed to detract significantly from respondents' satisfaction with their education. These aspects included relatively benign experiences, such as lacking a sense of community or "feel" of a cohort sometimes because of life circumstances such as living far away or coming back to academia after time away, and differing core values, goals, and expectations among students (for example, securing funding and publishing rather than building community and engaging in critical discussions). Other responses included more severe indications of students' experiencing or witnessing discrimination, intolerance, and other types of poor treatment from and among faculty and students. One respondent named "the blatant disregard for the racist/sexist/classist attitudes that many faculty and students have toward others, as well as the lack of energy to do something about it" as the least satisfying aspect of their educational experience. This response indicates not only specific attitudes but also apparent frustration with apathy and lack of accountability regarding these attitudes at an individual and programmatic or institutional level. Another respondent wrote, "I find that I am unhappy with the culture and politics of a PhD program. It seems that it is more important to publish and bring money into the school than to behave in an ethical and professional manner." This respondent goes on to say that this culture "has caused me to cross off academia as one of my next career options." Other responses indicated lack of diversity, pressure to produce, departmental politics, and bureaucracy more broadly as detracting from their overall satisfaction.

Quality of courses

The quality of required and elective courses was also consistently named as a less satisfying aspect of doctoral education and included the content and organization of individual courses as well as the overall structure and timing of course work within and across years. Quality also had to do with suitably advanced content that should be expected at the doctoral level. Courses named most frequently were theory, statistics, and research methods. One respondent reported, "My program has been disappointing, in part because there is very little theory or critical discussion in seminars. It has not felt like a real doctoral program in that regard." Other respondents also reported that their dissatisfaction had more to do with the lack of depth in course work and in-class discussions rather than the curricular structure itself. For some, this lack of depth included a critical consideration of issues of power in social work theory and in research.

Quality of mentorship

Responses indicated that a lack of alignment in substantive and methodological interests detracted from their perception of mentorship quality as well as overall satisfaction. One respondent noted that "not having a faculty mentor whose area of interest closely aligns with mine, who also can provide a different viewpoint from the majority" was the least satisfying

aspect of their doctoral education. Others reported that their mentors' lack of availability or accessibility detracted from their overall experience and satisfaction. There was also indication of respondents experiencing their mentors and advisers as hostile, discriminatory, or simply unfriendly. Some respondents were left wanting for an apprenticeship model, including more direct one-on-one attention, guidance, collaboration, and related publication opportunities. One respondent said that their satisfaction would have been greater with "more collaboration and mentorship from faculty in terms of co-authoring journal publications and for faculty to share when they have open positions on their grants." Consistent with other studies in the literature, human interactions seem to heavily contribute to satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

Financial issues

Respondents named several issues related to finances as detracting from their doctoral experience, which included insufficient or unpredictable funding opportunities for tuition, living, and research-related costs across stages in the program (pre- and postcandidacy). One respondent noted the least satisfying aspect was "the instability in funding and lack of fairness in its distribution at my home institution." The fairness aspect expressed here, although not common across related responses, was consistent with responses regarding the educational environment and equitable treatment. Others expressed fear or uncertainty about the amount of debt they would accrue throughout the course of the program.

Discussion

This national study revisits the question of student satisfaction by asking students in social work and social welfare about their experiences of doctoral education. Nearly 200 students from more than 50 programs shared the most and least satisfying parts of their doctoral education. Much of PhD students' satisfaction comes from an intellectually stimulating and emotionally supportive community of scholars where students can individualize their program of study, achieve milestones, and make translations between research, teaching, and practice. Dissatisfaction comes from unmet expectations for the learning environment, courses, mentorship, and predictable or ample financial support. The persistence of these themes across samples and over time lend to the trustworthiness of the findings but may also allude to the potential resistance of doctoral programs to change to meet student expectations. We also note how these themes, taken together, reflect important themes of social justice. Equitable institutional practices, including the distribution of material and social resources through access and opportunities, as well as the translation of scholarship into real-world applications to effect positive social change, signal ideals related to a socially just profession and society. When present, these practices as reported by respondents contribute to their satisfaction, and when absent, are barriers to satisfaction. Future attention is warranted on how social justice ideals can be more fully and intentionally integrated into the organizational practices of PhD programs, and how such practices may contribute to students' motivation to join the professoriate.

Students meeting the inclusion criteria for the quantitative analysis rated their general satisfaction with their PhD program highly, wherein 53% were satisfied and 32% were very satisfied (Table 2). This distribution is broadly consistent with data collected from social work students a decade ago (Anastas, 2012) and from doctoral students in other fields (Fagen & Suedkamp Wells, 2004; Ostriker, Kuh, & Voytuk, 2011). These data may reflect a typical favorable response bias in satisfaction surveys but situate social work as relatively typical among other disciplines. Our sample showed somewhat more dissatisfaction than is typical (15% of students dissatisfied with their experience), which could reflect a sampling bias or a meaningful difference to explore further. It is important to contextualize responses to the most and least satisfying parts of doctoral education, with the knowledge that overall satisfaction is quite high and does not differ between self-identified marginalized and nonmarginalized groups. On the other hand, knowing that satisfaction is quite high overall should not justify ignoring minority voices or dismissing the ideas of satisfied and unsatisfied students to learn about aspects of doctoral education that relate to their satisfaction and could be targeted for improvement efforts.

This study finds that nearly two thirds of social work PhD students are very interested in academic careers, and an additional 25% are somewhat interested in academic careers (see Table 2), which is higher than other contemporary estimates of interest in the professoriate among social work students, but it is more consistent with doctoral students in other professional schools (Dinerman, et al., 1999; Thurgood et al., 2006). This is a hopeful finding based on faculty recruitment needs and priorities for schools of social work around the country. Many doctoral programs are also conveying an expectation that students will pursue faculty positions. Nearly 60% of students perceive strong programmatic expectations that they will seek faculty positions. The majority of students are enrolled in programs where the expectations for seeking faculty positions match their personal interest in doing so.

This study finds some differences between students at public and private institutions and at institutions with different levels of research activity. In fact, program affiliation explained 38% of the variance in the respondent's report of programmatic expectations for seeking faculty positions, 30% of the variance in the respondent's interest in the professoriate, and 14% of the variance in the respondent's satisfaction with doctoral education. Our findings support the notion that program structures matter, but doctoral education is also highly individualized, and satisfaction can vary substantially within the same program based on the student's substantive area, methodological approach, funding stream, mentoring relationship, and other factors (Anastas, 2012; Shapiro et al., 2015).

Given omissions of previous studies, we directly asked respondents the extent to which their "satisfaction with doctoral education is explained by social justice training opportunities and a sense of a socially just institution." A vast majority of respondents (80%), across different levels of satisfaction, communicated that their satisfaction was related to issues of social justice (Table 2). Among PhD students at institutions characterized by very high research activity, student satisfaction was lower among those who explained their satisfaction through issues related to social justice, and student satisfaction was predictive of interest in the professorate. We

believe that this initial exploration provides justification for further inquiry. Research is needed to understand how students conceptualize issues of social justice when they provide responses to this question (Hudson, 2016), what programmatic experiences and opportunities for integrating diversity and social justice into the implicit and explicit curricula of doctoral education are desired, and what experiences will increase satisfaction and pipeline retention for academic careers. We recommend that those in social work regularly conduct large scale-projects using consumers in the formative and summative evaluation of our educational programs. Continued attention to student satisfaction and social justice, and the further refinement of instruments used to collect these data, appears important for understanding and improving the retention of doctoral graduates in the academy.

Limitations

Few studies of doctoral students in social welfare help contextualize our response rate. By most standards, our response rate is insufficient to have confidence in the generalizability of our findings. We caution readers to consider our findings exploratory, as our descriptive claims are based on a convenience sample of only 8% of doctoral students. This response rate does not justify or enable the use of causal modeling to explore mediated or moderated relationships among social justice, satisfaction, and interest in the professoriate. Although our sample seems reasonably representative in the ways we could check, our intention is not to test theory or to be the definitive truth on this topic but rather to provide preliminary descriptive information to doctoral students, program administrations, and researchers so that others may consider the constructs we have identified in their further interrogations of the doctoral experience. Our hope is that future research, informed by this work, will include testing of sophisticated hypotheses about the relationship between doctoral student satisfaction, interest in the professoriate, and experiences of doctoral students related to social justice.

Compared with similar studies, we collected sparse demographic information from participants. We only asked, “To what extent do you consider yourself to belong to identity groups structurally marginalized in academia?” As previously mentioned, this decision was made to protect the identity of participants while allowing comparisons within and across programs, a unique contribution of this study. We were able to look at institutional variables and institutional variance by asking for respondents’ educational institution without the risk to students of an exposed identity. Little is known, however, about patterns of reporting perceptions of marginalization or degree of marginalized status. In addition, experiences of marginalization carry unique histories and various contemporary implications that merit consideration. It would be interesting to conduct studies to better understand the reliability and validity of the survey question we used to determine marginalization. Similarly, we did not provide participants with a singular definition of social justice, which reflects a limitation because of our inability to determine the extent of knowledge respondents have regarding this topic, nor does it ensure that all responses are based on a shared understanding of social justice. Future research can explore doctoral students’ understandings of social justice and do so across a number of dimensions, including region, educational background, and social identities.

Implications for doctoral education in social work and social welfare

Given the struggle in social work to retain sufficient numbers of students in the pipeline to the professoriate, we believe that revisiting student satisfaction at least once a decade is warranted. This is only the fourth article in 40 years to use a national survey of doctoral students and the first to look at individual and institutional variance as well as directly ask about the role of social justice in doctoral student satisfaction. We do not presume that a metric of satisfaction should replace other desirable outcomes for doctoral education, nor that high standards for scholarship, teaching, and service be usurped by ensuring a pleasant experience. We do not believe that standards and satisfaction are mutually exclusive, and we note cases in which dissatisfaction was related to the lack of rigor in doctoral education. We document slightly higher rates of dissatisfaction in social welfare students relative to the best available benchmarks and a significant relationship between student satisfaction and interest in the professoriate among students at the most research-intensive universities. Furthermore, we find that 80% of students, across levels of satisfaction, explained their satisfaction through their perceptions of social justice. Among students at the most research-intensive universities, the extent to which students explained their satisfaction through social justice predicted their overall satisfaction. Social justice training opportunities, and a sense of a socially just institution, therefore, ought to be central in our efforts to prepare and retain individuals for the professoriate and the responsibilities and actions of steering, transmitting, and expanding the knowledge base of the discipline (Hudson, Shaprio, Ebiner, Berenberg, & Bacher, 2017).

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